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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000563

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [AA](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: DUCHESS OF YORK'S SECRET ORHANAGE VISIT PROMPTS
OUTCRY AND CALLS FOR IMPROVEMENT

¶1. Summary and comment: The November 6 airing of a British documentary made by the UK's Duchess of York Sarah Ferguson evoked strong reactions in Turkey due to the undercover manner in which the Duchess obtained the film's footage. Donning a wig and headscarf to disguise herself, Ferguson entered a two care centers for children with physical and mental disabilities and filmed footage of the disturbing treatment and condition of some of the children that was aired in the UK on November 6. Turkish officials condemned the secret filming as an attempt to sabotage Turkey's bid to enter the European Union. British officials do not expect the incident to change the UK's stance on Turkey's EU accession, and human rights organizations view the incident as an opportunity for Turkey to reinvigorate its stalled human rights reforms. The GOT's outcry epitomizes the reflexive defensiveness that distracts Turkey from enacting reforms on sensitive issues and that Turkey must overcome if it is to meet EU standards. End summary and comment.

¶2. In March 2008, Duchess of York Sarah Ferguson and Independent Television News correspondent Chris Rogers posed as aid workers and potential charitable donors to gain access to two rehabilitation centers for mentally and physically handicapped children in Turkey. With Ferguson in disguise, the pair secretly filmed their visits to Saray Rehabilitation Center in Ankara and Istanbul's Zeytinburnu Center for the Care of Disabled Children as part of a documentary aired on November 6 titled, "Duchess and Daughters: Their Secret Mission." The documentary covers the travels of Rogers, Ferguson and her two daughters to state-run institutions in Romania and Turkey. On November 2, Rogers released a written description and photos of what he termed "profoundly shocking" conditions in the Sunday Daily Mail prior to the documentary's release.

¶3. Turkish authorities condemned the secret filming and Minister of Health and Social Services Nimet Cubukcu, in charge of the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHCEK), launched an investigation into the "negligent" SHCEK employees who provided access to visitors with hidden cameras. Taking footage with concealed cameras in state institutions is against Turkish law. Cubukcu and other politicians accused Ferguson of attempting to sabotage Turkey's bid to enter the European Union by sullyng its image. While most conservative newspapers also shared the criticism of Turkish authorities against Ferguson, Radikal, Hurriyet, and Aksam published columns suggesting that Turkey should investigate the shortcomings of its orphanages and other state-sponsored facilities instead of trying to deflect blame. Reacting to the outcry by Turkish authorities, Ferguson defended her position but apologized for any embarrassment caused to Turkey. In a BBC interview, she said she supports Prime Minister Brown's decision to support EU accession for Turkey provided it put in place human rights safeguards for children.

¶4. British Embassy human rights officer Philippa Saunders told us that the incident will not change the UK's support for Turkey's EU accession. Saunders noted that the GOT is undertaking a genuine effort to improve foster care and improve training for SHCEK staff. The GOT also recognizes that over 60 percent of children are put into care for economic reasons, said Saunders, and it is working to prevent such economic decisions in the future. AKP MP and member of the Parliament's Human Rights Commission Abdurrahman Kurt said that although Ferguson's tactics may not have been the most appropriate, this incident will encourage the GOT to find creative methods to address the issue. He noted that Turkey has taken steps to improve the situation by providing financial support to parents who struggle with childcare costs and who have disabled children.

¶5. Contacts from human rights organizations were critical of the reaction by Turkish authority and certain members of the media to Ferguson's secret visit and expose. The Human Rights Foundation issued a press statement criticizing Cubukcu's reaction. Vice president of the Human Rights Research Association Ayse Bilgen said the Turkish media's coverage of the issue was a disservice to improving human rights in Turkey. The reporting focused Ferguson's circumvention of authorities and the government's reaction to her tactics and ignored the reality of the continuing poor state of orphanages and other social service facilities in Turkey. Bilgen said this coverage epitomized the reflexive defensiveness Turks often exhibit when evidence of a human rights deficiencies arise. When domestic or international human rights organizations point to a deficiency in the Turkish system, she explained, the government often tries to

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point to similarly existing situations in Europe. A vital step Turkey must take in order to becoming a modern democracy is to acknowledge its own shortcomings instead of trying to pretend they do not exist, according to Bilgen.

¶6. Turkey's first NGO dedicated to advocating for human rights in the field of mental health, Human Rights in Mental Health Initiative, released a detailed report on the state of mental health facilities in the country last week. Between June 2007 and October 2008 HRMHI conducted the research in collaboration with Human Rights Agenda Association and Bogazici University Social Policy Forum, with the permission of the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the Child Protection Agency. The research team including human rights lawyers, mental health specialists, and activists visited twelve of the 41 centers across Turkey, including Ankara's Saray Rehabilitation Center also visited by Ferguson. In addition to highlighting best practices, the team offered recommendations for the improvement of conditions in all orphanages. Common areas for improvement included:

- increasing the number of professional staff available
- improving hygienic conditions and the bed to child ratio (in some cases, two children slept in one bed)
- increasing the number of treatment facilities available at the institutions
- varying treatment from only antipsychotic drugs and antidepressants
- allowing for greater freedom of movement
- providing planned and regular rehabilitation activities for all residents
- obtaining consent for the use of electro-shock therapy

¶7. HRMHI president Sehnaz Layikel explained that the GOT must change its mentality with regard to mental health patients. As an example, she cited SHCEK's focus on building new housing in Saray rather than training staff or offering rehabilitation. "No expert in Turkey feels that a disabled child can improve. The government must change its mentality to one that considers disabled children to be humans with needs and emotions." In the future, Layikel suggests the

government provide expanded training for its staff and cooperate with NGOs dedicated to advocacy and support for the mentally disabled. She is pleased to see that Ferguson's visit has become a "human rights incident rather than a diplomatic incident."

WIENER